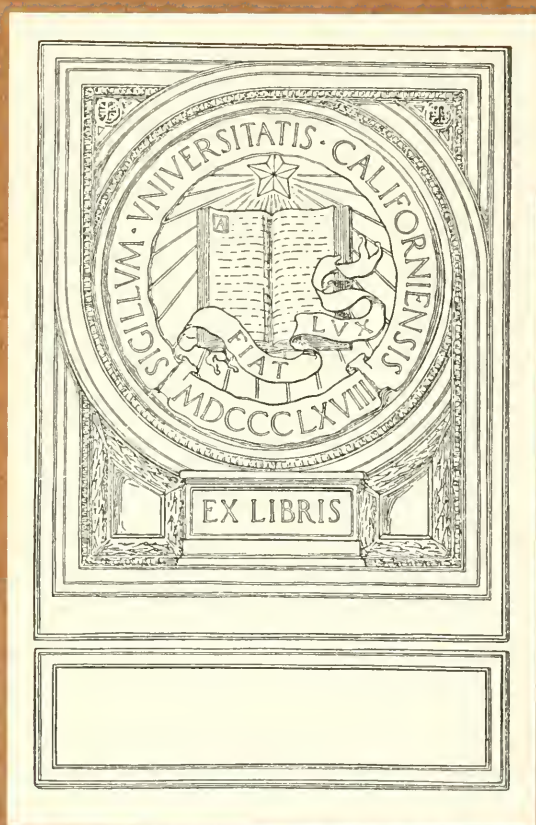


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SPECIAL REPORT

RELATIVE TO

PUBLIC DOCUMENTS.

BY

JOHN G. AMES,  
SUPERINTENDENT OF DOCUMENTS, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR.

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WASHINGTON:  
GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE.  
1894.



U. S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
SPECIAL REPORT

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## SPECIAL REPORT RELATIVE TO PUBLIC DOCUMENTS.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,  
*Washington, November 20, 1894.*

SIR: Referring to your verbal request for an expression of my views relative to the subject of public documents in general, and especially to the system and regulations governing their distribution, I beg leave to submit the following remarks:

The custom of issuing documents at the public expense for distribution among the people has prevailed for more than half a century, and their number has increased with the increase of population until the Government Printing Office has become the largest publishing house in the world, the product of its presses amounting to more than 1,000,000 volumes annually. From the beginning, however, there seems to have been no serious attempt on the part of any one to present public documents in an attractive form as to their general make-up, and especially their binding, nor to establish any thoroughly good system of classification and indexing, nor to introduce anything like business principles into the work of their distribution.

In considering this matter the question is at once suggested whether the benefits which have accrued to the public from the printing and distribution of documents justify the large expenditures involved, and whether the publications of the Government are of sufficient value to warrant the continuance of these expenditures. It is undoubtedly true that in the popular estimation public documents have held, and to a large degree still continue to hold, a very low place. They have, to be sure, been willingly received by citizens, because they have been gratuitously supplied; but to how many the mere fact that a volume is a public document carries with it the conclusion that it is of no practical value, except as an evidence that the recipient is borne in thoughtful and kindly remembrance by some member of Congress or other officer of the Government, or as it helps to fill a place in the bookcase that would otherwise remain vacant. And yet it is not too much to say that no series of publications of greater intrinsic value issue from any publishing house than from the Government Printing Office of the United States. Hundreds of thousands of dollars are expended every year, and hundreds of experts in their several departments are constantly employed, in prosecuting scientific research in many directions, in explorations, in careful investigations of economic and social questions, in experiments conducted after the most approved modern methods, all having practical ends in view and designed to promote the general material and social welfare, and it can not be otherwise than that the results of these researches, as detailed in the reports of such competent investigators, possess a value much beyond that usually assigned to public documents.

The publications of the Geological Survey, the Smithsonian Institution, the National Museum, the Commission of Fish and Fisheries, the Bureau of Ethnology, the Coast and Geodetic Survey, the Census Office, the Bureau of Statistics, the Bureau of American Republics, Consular Reports, and the reports of the National Academy of Sciences, the American Historical Association, and of the several international expositions, not to mention other documents—nearly all the work of specialists—contain a mass of important information not elsewhere accessible, making these publications works of permanent interest and standard reference. The regular and special reports of the Department of Agriculture are becoming increasingly valuable as bearing upon the development of the agricultural resources of the country, suggesting and opening the way to the establishment of new industries, protecting against fraud and adulteration, and so, in manifold ways, encouraging and affording aid to that largest element in our population—those whose support and prosperity depend upon the products of the forest and field.

The Department of Labor, by its investigations, is accumulating a store of facts, set forth in its reports, which, to the student of social science, is replete with interest, and which will materially assist in solving certain social questions and those growing out of the relations of capital and labor which are now pressing for consideration.

Of the reports of other departments and offices of the Government, many abound in information of practical importance much beyond and very different from the mere detail of their annual operations, while many of the reports of special commissions and of committees of the two Houses of Congress present the results of the most thorough and often exhaustive examination of subjects civil, financial, social, and economic, with which the well-being of the whole nation is intimately associated.

These publications, so full of interest and so important for present use and future reference, comprise a very large portion of current public documents.

Why is it, then, that the name "public document" suggests to so many a volume dull, uninteresting, unprofitable; a volume which, if it could not be had gratuitously, would not be worth procuring at all?

#### GRATUITOUS DISTRIBUTION.

Possibly the very fact that they have been given away in such vast numbers has had not a little to do with the low estimate placed upon them. That which costs nothing is usually little valued, and it is not irrational to suppose that when documents are pressed upon the people as a gratuity many of them come naturally to think that what is so freely bestowed is of small worth. This prejudiced conclusion is, however, undoubtedly decreasing, and the number of those who by careful reading of public documents learn to appreciate them at their real value is year by year on the increase.

#### UNATTRACTIVE BINDING.

Another cause of the popular impression regarding public documents is the forbidding aspect which they to so great an extent present. In a miscellaneous collection of books, it would not ordinarily be difficult to detect any chance public documents from their mere external appearance, so often in unfavorable contrast with surrounding volumes. Private publishers vie with each other in endeavors to make their publica-



tions attractive to the eye, understanding well that thus attention to their contents is not infrequently secured. It is, of course, essential that no extravagant expenditure be incurred in producing public documents; but it is doubtless true that at little or no additional expense many of the publications of the Government could be issued in a more attractive style than has hitherto characterized them.

A tasteful variety in the color of the binding of different series of documents, with uniformity in the color of those of the same series from year to year, would be a slight improvement upon past custom, though of late attention has evidently been given to this point. A set of the annual reports of the Smithsonian Institution in uniform style of binding is more attractive than, and for this reason preferable to, a set one volume of which is in red, another in black, and another in green. The same is true of other documents. To be sure, this is of minor importance; but whatever will secure increased attention to public documents and secure for them a permanent place upon the library shelf is deserving of consideration. In particular, however, it is believed that some advantageous change can readily be made in the binding and general make-up of what is known as the "reserved edition," from which all depositories of public documents are supplied. Everyone is familiar with these heavy "full sheep" volumes, and knows what appearance they present when massed upon the shelves of our public libraries. That anything popularly entertaining or interesting or profitable is to be found within their covers would not be inferred, more than within the covers of a series of volumes of legal lore. To bind in half morocco or half Russia would be little if any more expensive, but it would seem to put these publications almost out of the category of public documents, so great a divergence from the stereotyped style would they present. To reduce, on the average, by one-third the size of the volumes would be another material improvement, thus bringing them within the range of convenient manipulation

#### MULTIPLICITY OF EDITIONS.

Another source of great confusion and annoyance to those having occasion to consult public documents is the multiplicity of editions of many of the most important publications of the Government, issued in different styles of binding, with varying title pages and back titles, so that one may possess three or four copies of the same work without discovering from their outward appearance that they are all the same document. This is true of many of the annual reports of the executive offices, and to a less degree of the scientific publications of the Government. The former are all embraced in the executive documents of Congress, bound in leather, with a special front and back title. They appear again in an edition known as Message and Documents, correspondingly backed. Once more they are issued in a departmental edition, as reports of the Secretary of, etc., volumes 1, 2, etc., and lastly, many of them are published in a bureau edition as reports of the chief of the bureau, with an appropriate title.

This multiplicity of editions is the bane of librarians and indexers. It prevents any satisfactory classification and arrangement of these documents upon the library shelves, as it so often happens that one volume of a series is of one edition and the next of another; and so it is not surprising that sometimes an ordinary librarian in despair is disposed to reject all public documents, while the labor of preparing a satisfactory general index is so increased that any one may well hesitate to enter upon the undertaking.

I have before me now four volumes of which the back titles read as follows:

UNITED STATES	REPORT
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY.	of the
J. W. Powell,	SECRETARY
Director.	of the
—	INTERIOR.
Eleventh	Vol. 4.
Annual Report.	Part 1.
1889-'90.	1890.
Part 1.—Geology.	
MESSAGE	HOUSE
and	EXECUTIVE
DOCUMENTS	DOCUMENTS.
INTERIOR DEPARTMENT.	2d Session 51st Congress.
Vol. 4.	1890-'91.
Part 1.	Vol. 14.
1890-'91.	—
Report	Eleventh
of the	Annual Report
Director	of the
of the	
United States	Geological Survey.
Geological	Part 1.—Geology.
Survey.	

A casual glance at the volumes would not show what a more careful scrutiny discloses, that they are all one and the same work. This is but one of a multitude of documents to which the same confusion attaches.

Another evil resulting from this multiplicity of editions is that in many cases the same work is sent in duplicate and triplicate to the same person, under the impression that he is being supplied with different publications, as Senators and Representatives themselves sometimes fail to recognize the same volume under its several designations.

The remedy for this evil would seem to be comparatively simple. Let but one edition of any document be issued, or let all editions of the same document be practically reduced to one by having them all titled

and backed in the same manner. Let the appropriate name, that which most accurately describes its contents and distinguishes it from other documents, be put upon the back of every copy issued, so that it can be identified at a glance. If additional title on the back is required, as in the executive or miscellaneous documents of Congress, let it be evidently subordinate to the chief title, and not be made an obstacle to the identification of the volume. These remarks, of course, apply to documents homogeneous in their general character, and of sufficient size to form each a volume by itself, as it would be manifestly impracticable to deal in the manner suggested with volumes made up of a number of separate and distinct documents, such as compose a large portion of the executive and miscellaneous documents and reports of committees of the two Houses of Congress.

It is, however, worthy of consideration whether it would not be wise to bind separately every document sufficiently large to form a volume of convenient size, instead of combining them, as is so often done in the leather-bound series, into unwieldy tomes, bringing within the same covers documents as irrelevant and diverse as a report on Indian disbursements and the Annual Report of the Commissioner of Patents, or the Annual Report of the Director of the Mint and a report on the loss of the steamer *Jeannette*, or Revision of the Rules of the House of Representatives and Geological History of Lake Lahonton. If serious attention were given to it by those having authority in the premises, this whole matter could be readily and satisfactorily adjusted. It is certain that if this were done it would in many ways enlarge the use and increase the value of public documents.

#### CLASSIFICATION OF DOCUMENTS.

The publications of the Government known as Congressional documents, which embrace all the annual reports of the Executive Departments and offices of the Government and all other reports submitted by them, and including by far the larger portion of all public documents, are now divided into executive documents, miscellaneous documents, and reports of committees of the Senate and House of Representatives. This classification has been in vogue for forty years, and has therefore become familiar to all parties accustomed to consult them; but on general principles, the simpler the classification of documents the more convenient will reference to and the indexing of them be found. I see no necessity for the division of documents into executive and miscellaneous, or any decided advantage resulting from this classification; nor can any good reason be given in many cases for assigning documents to one class rather than to the other; as, for example, why the Annual Report of the Director of the Geological Survey should be assigned to the executive document class and the Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology to the miscellaneous document class, or why the Report of the Commissioner of Fish and Fisheries should be classed as a miscellaneous document instead of an executive document. Many other instances of this kind can readily be cited.

It is suggested, therefore, that the executive and miscellaneous documents of each House of Congress be consolidated, and that they be designated, respectively, Senate documents and House documents. There will then be two classes for each House, viz., Senate documents, Senate reports; House documents, House reports. Then let a series of numbers be arranged which shall be uniformly given to certain annual



publications of the Government, so that the same number shall attach to the same document year after year. The following enumeration of documents is suggested:

## HOUSE DOCUMENTS.

- Vol. 1, No. 1. President's Message (annual).
- Vol. 2, No. 2. Foreign Relations (State Department).
- Vol. 3, No. 3. Commercial Relations (State Department).
- Vol. 4, No. 4. Report of the Secretary of the Treasury on State of Finances.
- Vol. 5, No. 5. Report on Commerce and Navigation (Treasury Department).
- Vol. 6, No. 6. Report on Internal Commerce of the United States (Treasury Department).
- Vol. 7, No. 7. Report of the Comptroller of the Currency (Treasury Department).
- Vol. 8, No. 8. Report of the Commissioner of Internal Revenue (Treasury Department).
- Vol. 9, No. 9. Report of the Coast and Geodetic Survey (Treasury Department).
- Vol. 10, No. 10. Report of the Treasurer of the United States (Treasury Department).
- Vol. 11, No. 11. Report of the Director of the Mint (Treasury Department).
- Vol. 12, No. 12. Report of the Secretary of War.
- Vol. 13, No. 13. Report of the Chief of Engineers, parts I, II, etc. (War Department).
- Vol. 14, No. 14. Report of the Chief of Ordnance (War Department).
- Vol. 15, No. 15. Report of the Chief Signal Officer (War Department).
- Vol. 16, No. 16. Report of the Secretary of the Navy.
- Vol. 17, No. 17. Report of the Postmaster-General.
- Vol. 18, No. 18. Contracts for carrying the mails.
- Vol. 19, No. 19. Report of the Secretary of the Interior, parts 1, 2, etc.
- Vol. 20, No. 20. Report of the Director of the U. S. Geological Survey.
- Vol. 21, No. 21. Report on the Mineral Resources of the United States.
- Vol. 22, No. 22. Report of the Commissioner of Education.
- Vol. 23, No. 23. Report of the Attorney-General.
- Vol. 24, No. 24. Report of the Secretary of Agriculture.
- Vol. 25, No. 25. Report of the Chief of the Bureau of Animal Industry.
- Vol. 26, No. 26. Report of the Commissioner of Fish and Fisheries.
- Vol. 27, No. 27. Report of the Commissioner of Labor.
- Vol. 28, No. 28. Report of the Interstate Commerce Commission.
- Vol. 29, No. 29. Report of the Civil Service Commission.
- Vol. 30, No. 30. Report of the Smithsonian Institution.
- Vol. 31, No. 31. Report of the National Museum.
- Vol. 32, No. 32. Report of the Bureau of Ethnology, etc.

The simplicity of this scheme is emphasized by putting it in contrast with that now in vogue, as follows:

- Vol. 1, No. 1, Pt. 1. Foreign Relations of the United States.
- Vol. 2, No. 1, Pt. 2. Report of Secretary of War, Vol. 1.
- Vol. 3, No. 1, Pt. 2. Report of Secretary of War, Vol. 2, Pt. 1. Engineers, Pt. 1.
- Vol. 4, No. 1, Pt. 2. Report of Secretary of War, Vol. 2, Pt. 2. Engineers, Pt. 2.
- Vol. 5, No. 1, Pt. 2. Report of Secretary of War, Vol. 2, Pt. 3. Engineers, Pt. 3.
- Vol. 6, No. 1, Pt. 2. Report of Secretary of War, Vol. 2, Pt. 4. Engineers, Pt. 4.
- Vol. 7, No. 1, Pt. 2. Report of Secretary of War, Vol. 3. Ordnance.
- Vol. 8, No. 1, Pt. 3. Report of Secretary of Navy, Vol. 1.
- Vol. 9, No. 1, Pt. 3. Report of Secretary of Navy, Vol. 2.
- Vol. 10, No. 1, Pt. 4. Report of Postmaster-General.
- Vol. 11, No. 1, Pt. 5. Report of Secretary of the Interior, Vol. 1. Lands, etc.
- Vol. 12, No. 1, Pt. 5. Report of Secretary of the Interior, Vol. 2. Indians.
- Vol. 13, No. 1, Pt. 5. Report of Secretary of the Interior, Vol. 3. Miscellaneous.
- Vol. 14, No. 1, Pt. 5. Report of Secretary of the Interior, Vol. 4, Pt. 1. Geological Survey, Pt. 1.
- Vol. 14, Pt. 2, No. 1, Pt. 5. Report of Secretary of the Interior, Vol. 4, Pt. 2. Geological Survey, Pt. 2.
- Vol. 15, No. 1, Pt. 5. Report of Secretary of the Interior, Vol. 5, Pt. 1. Education, Pt. 1.
- Vol. 15, Pt. 2, No. 1, Pt. 5. Report of Secretary of the Interior, Vol. 5, Pt. 2. Education, Pt. 2.
- Vol. 16, No. 1, Pt. 6. Report of Commissioners of District of Columbia.
- Vol. 17, No. 1, Pt. 7. Report of Secretary of Agriculture, etc.

The cause of the formidable notation of most of the annual reports of the Executive Departments above shown is, I suppose, found in the

fact that these reports are submitted to Congress by the President in connection with his annual message. It is, however, curious to observe that to the message itself no distinct number is given, nor is it even indicated, in the notation or the table of contents accompanying the executive documents, where the message is found. The fact above noted does not appear to afford any adequate reason whatever for continuing for a single year this cumbersome system of numbering documents. No advantage is gained by it. Not one person in a thousand who handles these documents understands the meaning of it. It simply confuses and bewilders, and can well give way to a simpler system and one more readily comprehensible by all.

In my judgment, however, it would be still better to discontinue the classification of all annual publications as executive and miscellaneous documents of the Senate and House of Representatives. It in no wise facilitates reference to them, nor renders their identification more easy, that these publications are so classified. In fact, there is no evident reason why one should be classed as a Senate and another as a House document. They are all submitted to Congress and are printed by order, not of the Senate or of the House, but of the Congress. There seems, therefore, to be no good and satisfactory reason why these regular annual reports should be designated as documents either of the Senate or of the House. It would, I think, on every consideration, be preferable that they should be issued as separate and distinct series, with uniform title page and back title, excepting the date, so that each Department or bureau series could be arranged by itself, if desired. The following examples embody the above suggestion:

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE  
and  
FOREIGN RELATIONS.

—

1891.

—

State Department.

THE STATE  
of the  
FINANCES.

—

1891.

—

Treasury Department.

REPORT  
of the  
COMMISSIONER  
of  
INDIAN AFFAIRS.  
1891.

Interior Department.

CONSULAR REPORTS.  
Vol. 39.  
Nos. 140 to 143.  
MAY TO AUGUST,  
1892.

State Department.



10	SPECIAL REPORT RELATIVE TO PUBLIC DOCUMENTS.	
	REPORT	REPORT
	of the	of the
	DIRECTOR	SECRETARY
	of the	of
	UNITED STATES	WAR,
	GEOLOGICAL SURVEY.	with
	1891—Vol. 1.	Appendixes.
	Interior Department.	1891
		War Department.

In contrast with these, the following shows the style now in force:

HOUSE	HOUSE
EXECUTIVE	MISCELLANEOUS
DOCUMENTS,	DOCUMENTS,
1st Sess. 52d Cong.	1st Sess. 52d Cong.
1891-'92. *	1891-'92.
Vol. 1.	Vol. 49.
—	—
FOREIGN RELATIONS	CONSULAR REPORTS,
of the	Nos. 140 to 143.
UNITED STATES.	1892.
1891.	
HOUSE	HOUSE
EXECUTIVE	EXECUTIVE
DOCUMENTS,	DOCUMENTS,
1st Sess. 52d Cong.	1st Sess. 52d Cong.
1891-'92.	1891-'92.
Vol. 5.	Vol. 17.
—	—
REPORT	REPORT
of the	of the
SECRETARY OF WAR.	SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR.
Vol. 2—1891.	1891.
ENGINEERS—Part 3.	GEOLOGY—Part 4.

Should these suggestions be adopted, all the annual reports in question would be excluded from the category of executive or miscellaneous documents, leaving to be included in the simple classification of Senate and House documents only such communications as should, from time to time, be submitted to either House from the Executive Departments or from other sources. The number of volumes which these documents would annually form would be very small.

#### UNBOUND DOCUMENTS.

A large and needless waste in the matter of public documents is occasioned by the enormous issue of unbound copies which takes place under present regulations.

It is undoubtedly true that many documents must be delivered in unbound form for the immediate use of Congress in current legislation, but in the aggregate these form only a small portion of those thus issued, chiefly reports of committees and certain of the current executive and miscellaneous documents. But that 600 or 700 copies each of the quarto volumes of the Eleventh Census, of Records of the Rebellion, of the Official Register of the United States, of the annual reports of the Bureau of Ethnology, of the Geological Survey, and of other costly scientific publications of the Government, and of such annual reports of Executive Departments as form each a separate and entire volume, should be issued in unbound form for such disposition as usually befalls these documents seems wholly unnecessary.

The documents of the Fifty-second Congress, delivered in unbound form, amounted to about 140,000 volumes. Of these, more than 100,000 were each separate and distinct works, comprising the most valuable of Government publications, and which, had they been bound before leaving the Printing Office, would have been serviceable for distribution, and so of value to the public.

I am aware that not a few of these documents are selected for binding by members of Congress under the provision of law allowing each Senator and Representative to have bound in special binding, at public expense, for his own use, one copy of each and every document issued during his term of service. This, however, by no means exhausts the supply of unbound documents, especially as each member of Congress is supplied with a copy of each volume of Congressional documents, bound in full sheep or calf, for his personal use. Some, and perhaps many, members are satisfied with this last provision for their own library, and therefore make no demands upon the unbound collection.

Reform in this matter will consist either in largely reducing the number issued unbound, carefully discriminating between those that are and those that are not required for immediate use in legislation, or in binding all documents which constitute each by itself an independent volume before they are sent from the Printing Office, thus making them available for general distribution.

#### A GENERAL INDEX.

Nothing is more imperatively demanded in connection with public documents than a thorough, exhaustive, comprehensive index. The judgment of all librarians and others who have much to do with Government publications is voiced by the director of the New York State library, who says:

In view of the enormous amount of money spent by the General Government on public printing, it seems strange that proper provision for expert indexing has not yet been made. I should be willing to undertake to prove before a fair and competent jury that it would be an enormous gain in the practical value of our public documents if they could be satisfactorily indexed by an expert, even if the number of copies published were reduced so as to save twenty times the cost of the indexing. The trifling expense is the only conceivable objection to having this work properly done, and if the United States is too poor to pay for it they can make a specific economy by doing the two things for which there is a constantly growing demand from intelligent users: (1) Indexing the documents properly; (2) distributing them systematically to the libraries of the country. Half the number by this method would do five times the good.

And by the librarian of the Apprentices' Library, New York City, who, referring to this subject, uses the following language:

It is high time something was done to provide a clew to the many valuable works now buried in the literary labyrinth called "public documents." With a general index to all public documents heretofore published, on some simple and easily understood method of classification by subjects, librarians would frequently be able to put these Government publications to good use. As it is, neither the librarian nor the reader knows what they contain, and there is no way of finding it out. The consequence is, that, in the majority of cases, public documents are practically a useless incumbrance to a library. Yet no librarian would do without them, for he hopes that some day a key will be provided which will unlock their treasures.

A comprehensive index of all public documents would remedy the evils of which these gentlemen speak, and would increase immensely their use, and, therefore, their value to the public. It is no wonder that comparatively few are willing to take the time and trouble to trace the discussion of any particular subject as presented in these publications, or even to search for a single paper that is known to be embraced in some volume of this lengthening series, nor that librarians are so often confused and perplexed when asked where such papers are to be found. The very multiplicity of documents published makes such an index an imperative necessity, if these documents are to any large extent to be utilized and to subserve the purposes for which they are printed and distributed. It should be prepared after methods approved by the best indexers, and week by week, as documents are published, so that with the assembling of Congress each year the index of all documents issued during the preceding fiscal year may be ready for the use of Senators and Representatives, and of all others interested.

Provision should be made for extending this index backward over the documents of preceding Congresses until it shall embrace all the publications of the Government from the beginning.

The index which I have recently prepared of documents issued during the period covered by the Fifty-first and Fifty-second Congresses, and which will soon be published, is an effort in this direction, and will, I trust, prove an efficient suggestion as to the general form in which an index satisfactory to all may be embodied.

#### UNDISTRIBUTED DOCUMENTS.

It is estimated that there now remain in the various document store-rooms, especially those about the Capitol, not less than 1,000,000 volumes of public documents, which represent the undistributed accumulations of many years. Some of these date back more than half a century. They embrace all classes of documents, and are, of course, as individual volumes, of greatly varying value. The great mass of them, however, are probably of very little worth for distribution among the public at large. Few citizens would care to receive these old publications, and if distributed promiscuously, as are many documents, they

will be simply thrown away. By far the most advantageous disposition that can be made of these documents is to use them, first, to supply deficiencies in the public, university, and college libraries of the country; secondly, to make them the nuclei of new public libraries in communities where no libraries now exist, and to this extent encourage the formation of new libraries. For these purposes this great collection of old documents is most valuable. If they are allowed to be scattered by an indiscriminate distribution, no such opportunity to benefit libraries, and the public through them, is likely ever again to occur.

To accomplish this end, however, they should all be turned over to some one officer of the Government, who shall be responsible for the distribution of the entire number, and shall see that each State receives its equitable share, and that the documents are most advantageously placed for reaching the public at large. It is because I believe this to be by far the best use that can be made of these old documents that I regret the provision in the printing bill now before Congress which turns them all over pro rata to the members of the present Congress. Of course, no individual Congress has any claim upon them. It is only a question of how most advantageously to dispose of them, which ought to be done at once, as at present they serve no good purpose, but are only an incumbrance. Undoubtedly under the provisions of the bill referred to, some, perhaps many, of these volumes will find their way into public libraries, but few members of Congress, I imagine, will be able to take the time and trouble to ascertain whether the libraries to which they may transmit a portion of their quota are not already supplied with these very documents. If the distribution proposed is made, the quota of each Senator and Representative will be about 2,000 volumes, of which I think it is safe to say that not more than one-fourth will be of any practical value, unless deposited in libraries now without them. Most of them are too antiquated for general distribution, and if so distributed will soon find their way to the junk shop and paper mill.

#### A NEW DEPARTURE.

I take the opportunity, in this connection, of saying that, in my judgment, the time has come for a new and somewhat radical departure in the whole matter of the distribution of public documents. The present system involves, of necessity, a measure of injustice and partiality, and tends to burden the Government with an ever-increasing expenditure in the way of public printing. The edition of any particular document issued, even if, as in the case of the Agricultural Report, it is no less than 500,000 copies, suffices for supplying the volume to only one in a large number of the citizens of a State or Congressional district, of whom at least many others are equally entitled to a copy. As for documents issued in editions of the ordinary number, very few can receive a copy. It is not possible, therefore, to make any equitable distribution of them among the population, for where only one person can be supplied, a score, a hundred, or a thousand more have, on every proper consideration, an equally just claim to the favor. The proportion of those who can not secure documents must also necessarily increase with the increase of population, unless Congress is willing to make constantly increasing appropriations for the printing of documents for gratuitous distribution.

Constant discrimination must, therefore, be practiced in the granting of these gratuities at the public expense, and it is no unreasonable or unjust reflection upon members of Congress to suppose that in many



if not the majority of cases this discrimination is in the first place based chiefly upon partisan grounds, that these public favors are in Republican districts given to Republicans, and in Democratic districts to Democrats. This itself is destructive of any fair and equitable distribution of Government publications, unless, indeed, these publications are regarded as the personal perquisite of each Senator and Representative, to be placed where, in a political sense, they will do the most good, or to be used in any other way for his personal advantage. This supposition, however, involves the denial of every argument and principle by which the printing and distribution, at vast expense, of public documents has hitherto been justified, and also the assumption of authority on the part of Congress to add indefinitely to the "personal perquisites" of its members.

In view of these facts, it is worthy of serious consideration whether the printing of documents for general gratuitous distribution may not properly and wisely be greatly restricted, if not altogether terminated, and in its place be substituted their publication only for the use of officers of the Government, for deposit in public libraries, and for sale. I would suggest that a sufficient number of all the publications of the Government be issued to supply one library in each Congressional district and two at large in each State with a copy of each document, these libraries to be designated depositories of public documents; and that an additional number of all important and valuable publications be issued sufficient for the supply of, say, 10 public, university, college, and school libraries in each Congressional district, and 20 at large in each State, to be named by Senators and Representatives.

In the case of States and districts in which libraries to the number specified have not yet been established, then documents should be deposited in the chief centers of population with some public officer of the county or town, who will hold them for the use of the community, thus bringing them within the reach of all the citizens, and encouraging, as it would in many instances, the establishment of permanent public libraries. When this liberal provision for libraries is made, the gratuitous distribution to individuals may properly cease. This principle has already been applied in the case of the Official Gazette of the Patent Office and of certain publications of the Geological Survey, and works, I believe, to the satisfaction of all concerned.

Adequate provision must of course be made for the sale of documents, the price of which should be merely the cost of reproducing them from stereotype plates. When it is made possible for a citizen to consult a public document by resorting to the public library of the town, it can not be considered a hardship if he be required to pay the small price at which it can be purchased should he desire a copy for his own personal use, either because of its intrinsic value or because it fills a vacant space in his library case. The begging of documents by our citizens, and the giving of them as a complimentary gratuity by officers of the Government, can not but have a demoralizing tendency. Therefore, for both economical and moral reasons, I believe it would be best to discourage their general gratuitous distribution, and to make such provision that any one desiring them can, in an independent and manly way, secure them by purchase.

#### A BUREAU OF DOCUMENTS.

The experience and observation of each succeeding year in the matter of the distribution of public documents only help to confirm the conviction that the one reform most essential, whether regard be had



to economy, or to the general convenience, or to approved business methods, is the establishment of one single bureau or office at which the whole business of distributing the publications of the Government issued for gratuitous distribution, shall be conducted. It is doubtful if any other instance can be cited in the conduct either of important public or private affairs in which methods so illy considered, so wasteful, so wanting in system, and in general so vicious, have obtained and continued in force year after year, with no serious effort at correction.

The business of publishing and distributing documents has grown to large proportions, and every one will admit that the distributing as well as the publishing should be done on sound business principles. The Government has no money to squander in this direction more than in the transaction of its ordinary executive business, over the expenditures for which a most watchful supervision is exercised.

The question of how most advantageously to the public, most economically to the Government, most conveniently to all concerned, the distribution of the vast mass of public literature which issues from the Government Printing Office can be made, certainly deserves consideration, and if better methods than now prevail can be suggested, they should be adopted without delay.

The chief evil of the present method is found in the fact that of nearly all public documents there are at least three, and often four, distinct agencies of distribution, viz., the Senate, the House of Representatives, the department under whose supervision the document is prepared, and the special bureau or office from which it emanates. The laws authorizing the printing of documents usually run as follows: So many copies for the use of the Senate, so many for the use of the House of Representatives, and so many for the use of the Department or bureau by which they are prepared. In addition to this, each Department publishes an edition, large or small, of its own annual reports for its own use. Now, all these distributing agencies act for the most part without any information as to, or regard for, what the others are doing. One unavoidable consequence is, that duplication and triplication of Government favors in the form of documents, often costly, exist to a large degree. Another consequence is the employment of an unnecessary number of officers and agents in transacting the work of distribution. Under the present methods, the document and folding rooms of the Senate and House must be maintained, and corresponding offices in the several Executive Departments and bureaus, each with its equipment of officers and subordinates, when the whole business might and should be conducted under the supervision of a single set of officers, involving, almost as a matter of course, a less number of subordinates and largely reduced expenditures.

A third consequence of this multiplicity of agents of distribution is the scarcely less than general confusion that exists, as well in the minds of members of Congress as on the part of the public at large, as to where many Government publications are to be obtained, the ascertainment of which information costs often not a little trouble and annoyance. Senators and Representatives are aware that attention to the requests of their constituents in the matter of documents involves repeated visits to or correspondence with the several Departments of the Government, which they would generally, if practicable, gladly avoid.

All these and other evils could in the main be remedied by the establishment of a bureau of documents, under the general management of a competent executive officer, at which the entire business of distributing documents, excepting such as are required for official use, should be

conducted. This would make possible at once the introduction of sound business principles and methods into the conduct of this arge department of public affairs, which under existing conditions can not possibly be done. It would so centralize and systematize the whole work as to reduce expenses to the minimum. It would to a large extent relieve the Capitol and the several Executive Departments of that which is now an incumbrance in the way of masses of documents occupying rooms which are greatly needed for other purposes. It would make possible, by a simple system of registration, the prevention of all duplication in the distribution of documents of sufficient value to warrant the expense of such registration, and thus make a given number of the same available for the largest service. It would subserve the convenience of all having to do with documents, as it would provide a single source from which documents themselves or information regarding them could always promptly be secured. It would relieve members of Congress of much of the trouble and annoyance which they now experience, as it substitutes one place and agency for dealing with this whole question of documents, in place of the many now existing.

The building for the bureau of documents should be located in immediate proximity to the Government Printing Office, so that from the bindery all documents could be transferred to it without the employment of wagon transportation, thus avoiding the large expense that now attends the delivery of documents to the Capitol and the Executive Departments. It should, however, be entirely independent of the Printing Office, its chief officer being appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate. The two offices should operate as checks upon each other.

A branch post-office should be established at the bureau, so that all documents could be mailed at once and taken directly to the postal cars at the railroad station, and thus avoid all the expense of hauling them to the city post-office for mailing, as well as the rehauling there required. The necessity for a new printing office may make the erection of the necessary building for a bureau of documents easily practicable, and it may also be found that the building can be so located that railroad tracks can be readily laid to the very doors of the bureau, so that documents could be mailed without any wagon transportation at all.

It is probable that few persons have any adequate conception of the amount of such transportation rendered necessary by the present system. It is estimated that the weight, for instance, of the annual editions of the following publications exceeds the figures named:

	Tons.
Report of the Secretary of Agriculture.....	650
Report of the Commissioner of Education.....	60
Report of the Smithsonian Institution.....	50
Report of the Geological Survey.....	120
Abridgement of Message and Documents.....	50

That the weight of the reports of the Eleventh Census will not be less than 1,300 tons, nor that of the entire edition of Rebellion Records less than 2,000 tons. The weight of the "usual number" edition of the documents of the Fifty-second Congress probably exceeds 650 tons, while that of all the documents appertaining to or issued during the Fifty-second Congress can not be less than 5,000 tons, or 10,000,000 pounds.

Under the existing system most of these documents, before they leave the city on the way to their final destination, must be transferred first from the bindery to the Congressional or departmental folding rooms, then from these folding rooms to the post-office, and finally from

the post-office to the railway station, necessitating their being handled at least seven times. This is equivalent to the loading, unloading, and wagon transportation from one place to another of 15,000 tons, or 30,000,000 pounds, and to the single handling of 35,000 tons, or 70,000,000 pounds, of the public documents of a single Congress.

By the establishment of a bureau of documents, as suggested, however, with railway tracks adjacent thereto, the labor and expense of this multiplied hauling and handling of documents can be vastly reduced. The documents would then be delivered by the bindery to the bureau, and by the bureau to the mail car, without the intervention of any wagon transportation whatever, and with the least possible amount of handling of individual volumes.

When regarded from a business point of view, there seems to be no single legitimate objection to the establishment of such a bureau of distribution, subserving, as it must, the general convenience, and resulting, as it may readily be made to do, in a large saving of public money. It is certain that if this were the business of an individual, and not of the Government—if the expenses were paid from a private purse and not from the public treasury—the clumsy and costly system now in force would not be tolerated a single day.

It is objected to the establishment of a bureau of documents that it will, in some way, interfere with the rights and prerogatives of members of Congress and heads of departments and bureaus, and put in jeopardy certain privileges now enjoyed by them. This objection, however, is absolutely without foundation. What can the head of the bureau of documents do in this direction that can not now be done by the superintendents of the Senate and House folding rooms? Whatever privileges are granted by law would continue, and it would be very easy for Congress to formulate such regulations for application in the daily administration of the bureau as would secure each member the full enjoyment of these privileges. No document belonging to the quota of any Senator or Representative would be distributed except upon his order, and then not without having his "compliments" or his autograph attached, or without its being accompanied by information that it is sent upon his order, thus securing to him all the credit and honor attaching to the gift.

Should any Senator or Representative, as would undoubtedly sometimes be the case, desire to withdraw the whole or a portion of his quota of any document from the bureau for the purpose of personally supervising its distribution, or of attaching his frank to the individual volumes with his own hands, this could be done as readily as under the existing system. During sessions of Congress such telephonic and messenger service should be provided as the convenience of members requires, so that their orders could reach the bureau and be executed with the least possible delay.

The same remarks apply to the heads of departments and offices of the Government whose quotas of documents would be held for distribution by the bureau. Their privileges should and could be just as carefully guarded in every particular, and whatever advantages are supposed to accrue from their direct distribution of documents should in all the correspondence and other acts of the bureau be secured to them. All these things are mere matters of detail in the administration of the bureau, and it is believed can be readily arranged to the entire satisfaction of all concerned.

It is also urged as an objection to the proposed plan that probably certain members of Congress would be unwilling to submit to the head



of the bureau lists of constituents to whom they wish their documents sent, lest some partisan or unfriendly use should be made of them. In reply to this, it may be said that the bureau of documents is the last place in which a partisan spirit should be tolerated, and that the least attempt to make use of lists in the manner indicated should meet with summary punishment. This can be provided for by bureau regulations or by Congressional action. In the second place, the same objection holds against submitting lists to the superintendents of the folding rooms of the two Houses. The same perverted use can as readily be made of them there as in the bureau of documents. The fact is, however, that this evil is probably one of the imagination alone. In the third place, if any member of Congress fears that his lists will not be treated confidentially by the bureau, or if for any reason he prefers that no one shall know what disposition he makes of his documents, he will always be at liberty, as now, to withdraw his quota and distribute it from his own rooms.

Objection has also been raised against a bureau of documents on the alleged ground that it will increase the expense of their distribution; that such a bureau, once established, will tend to grow in the matter of employes altogether beyond the necessities of the service. What has been already said is perhaps a sufficient reply to this objection. The saving which might be effected in the single matter of transportation would suffice to pay a large portion of the expenses of the bureau, while the centralization and consolidation of the whole business will, if properly conducted, necessarily render it possible to reduce the number of employes required. In addition, much space now occupied by documents in the Departments, at the Capitol, and in rented buildings will become available for other uses, and rent now being paid for equivalent accommodations cease. In a building constructed especially for the purpose, documents can be stored and handled much more economically, both as to space and labor, than in the ordinary document rooms. Furthermore, the number of employes of the bureau could not, at any time, exceed that which Congress deems proper, any more than is the case with the folding rooms of the Senate and House, as the number must be determined by the action of Congress itself. All apprehension of extravagance in this direction is, in my judgment, entirely without foundation. If the plan suggested is ever tried, the condition of things in this respect will be found eminently satisfactory in comparison with that which now exists.

It is somewhat singular that a practice which is approved and adopted in the interest of economy in the transaction of almost every other large business should be questioned and refused application in this, as though the unification and consolidation of this whole work would result in larger expenditures. On the contrary, it is altogether probable that the amount saved by discontinuing the present system and establishing a single bureau of documents would suffice to pay nearly all, if not the entire, expenses of its administration.

It is not believed that any possible arguments can be urged against the proposition here submitted which can justify continuing the cumbersome and extravagant system now in vogue, or the force of which would not be quickly dissipated by the practical operations of the bureau of documents, which, under the strictly impartial, upright, and responsible administration of its affairs that alone should be tolerated, would soon vindicate the wisdom of its establishment by introducing convenience, order, unity, and economy into this by no means unimportant department of the public service.

To recapitulate, the reforms above suggested are:

First. A change in the binding of documents, so that they shall present a more attractive appearance.

Second. The discontinuance of the practice of issuing the same document in several editions with differing titles.

Third. A modification of the classification of documents in the interest of simplicity and general convenience.

Fourth. The stopping the issue, in unbound form, of documents not required for immediate use.

Fifth. The preparation of a general comprehensive index of all public documents.

Sixth. The utilization of documents more largely in the interest of public libraries, and through them of the public at large.

Seventh. The restriction of the gratuitous distribution of documents, and more satisfactory provision for their sale.

Eighth. The establishment of a bureau of documents by which the whole business of distributing documents shall be conducted.

I am glad to call attention to the fact that provisions for effecting some of these reforms are embraced in the printing bill which has been under consideration by the present Congress and is now in conference.

This bill provides more liberally than do existing laws for public libraries, especially those which are designated as depositories of documents, but its provisions for the many other libraries of the country are inadequate. It also provides in a very satisfactory way for cataloging and indexing all future publications of the Government, but makes no provision of this character for those already issued. This need is, however, partially met by a separate bill now under consideration by Congress.

The printing bill also favorably modifies the classification of documents, and aims to prevent hereafter the accumulations of undistributed documents, such as now encumber certain folding rooms of the Government. As a whole, the bill is the most comprehensive and the best relating to this subject that has ever been presented to Congress, and with certain modifications which can yet be made, not in the least affecting its integrity, its enactment into a law, which it is hoped may be speedily accomplished, will, without question, subserve the convenience and interests of all concerned.

That other changes in existing methods of dealing with the subject of public documents in the interest of economy and of the public convenience are not provided for, and especially that the generally faulty, extravagant, heterogeneous, and unbusinesslike system of distributing documents hitherto prevailing is still to be left in force, is much to be regretted.

It is, perhaps, not too much to hope that other measures necessary to accomplish all these reforms may soon receive the attention and approval of Congress, and, in particular, that when the new printing office, the erection of which is urged alike by the demands of the public service and of humanity, shall be provided for, the plan may embrace within its scope the erection also of an adjacent building, in which shall be centralized and conducted, in accordance with approved business methods, the whole work of distributing the publications of the Government.

Very respectfully,

JOHN G. AMES,  
*Superintendent of Documents.*

Hon. HOKE SMITH,  
*Secretary of the Interior.*







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